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AUTHOR Zettersten, Arne
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ABSTRACT

A Swedish language teacher's experiences with recent developments in language teaching technology such as videotext, teletext, microcomputers, and videotapes and videodisks are presented. His conclusions regarding this new technology include the following: videotext is suitable for self-testing and distance education because it is interactive, but this system is costly and used mostly outside of education; teletext is more limited than videotext and is non-interactive but it is useful for reinforcing and testing vocabulary and grammar for a large audience; microcomputers are suitable for self-testing and for training in vocabulary and grammar, are relatively inexpensive, and are more suitable for school than university level instruction; videotapes and videodisks are extremely useful for institutions equipped to produce them; and the combination of the videodisk and microcomputer is particularly promising. (MSE)

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Arne Zettersten
Department of English
University of Copenhagen

NEW TECHNOLOGY IN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND TESTING

Since so many new technologies are creeping up on us - some of them even starting to dominate our lives - it is rather important for the language teacher to ask the following questions:

a) what techniques are useful?

b) what techniques are rather useless or too expensive?

c) what specific functions are these new technologies likely to serve in the future?

In order to answer these questions, I should like to describe some of the experiences I have had with these techniques over the last few years. The ones I am going to dwell on to-day are:

1. Videotext or Viewdata (in Swedish teledata or datavision);
2. Teletext (in Swedish text-TV);
3. Microcomputers or homecomputers;
4. Video, videodiscs.

I shall describe my experiments one by one, but before doing so I should like to explain some of the most common terms used for some of these electronic media.

Videotex is the covering name for all systems by which textual information is transmitted on a television screen.

Videotext (or Viewdata) is one variant of videotex. It is an interactive system by which the viewer is connected with a data-base (i.e. a central computer) through his own telephone. The user needs both a modem attached to the telephone to convert the incoming signal and a keyboard.

Prestel, the British videotext system, was the first in operation. It was introduced by the British postal service in 1979.

Viewdata is the term used in Hong Kong run by Hong Kong Telephone Company. It is also used in Australia.

Telematique is the French system.

Captain is the Japanese system.

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Bildschirmtext is the German system.
Teledata (or Datavision) is the term used in Sweden, Denmark and Norway.
Telset and Mistel are used in Finland.

Teletext is a one-way videotex system, whereby unused lines of television signal can carry textual material such as news, airline schedules, classified ads, etc.

Ceefax was started by the BBC in 1976.
Oracle is a similar system operated by ITV.
Antiope is the French system.
Telidon is the Canadian system, and
Text-TV is the Swedish term for the same system.

A great many computer-assisted language learning projects were initiated in the 1960's and 1970's. These projects were set up either on big so-called mainframe computers or on minicomputers. The best known computer-assisted learning system is probably Plato, developed in the early 1970's at the University of Illinois.

When the microcomputers, such as Apple, Pet, Vic, Atari, Sharp, Sinclair and what-not appeared, towards the end of the 1970's, they created a real revolution in money-saving and technique. The micros (or homecomputers) flooded the market, particularly in the United States. As we all know, the main reason for the popularity of the homecomputers was their suitability for games, not for education. It is only recently that microcomputers have been more widely used in education. In Europe, Britain has been in the lead through its Microelectronics Education Programme (MEP).

The boom in videos came even earlier than the one in micros. There is a lot of material for the language teacher to use, but surprisingly little software in the way of background material for documentary video programmes, etc. It is also very seldom that teachers are in the position to make their own video recordings of class-room work, or of simulations and role-playing by students.

The newest technology at the moment is the videodisc and microcomputers linked with videodisc units, which have already been announced for example by Sony.

Now, what kind of experiments did I do with all these technologies?

1. Videotext

In collaboration with Televerket, Stockholm, and LiberHermods, Malmö, I developed and programmed a vocaburaty test system for "Datavision" to be

used for self-testing. The result for each individual taking the test was a statement indicating the range of his vocabulary. At the moment, I am also involved in a project where I produce training systems in grammar and composition for the Hong Kong Telephone Company on its Viewdata system.

2. Teletext

In collaboration with Utbildningsradion at the Swedish Television Company, I created a system whereby vocabulary can be reinforced before, during and after language programmes or documentary programmes on TV. By using the teletext technique, certain crucial phrases in e.g. "Panorama of the week" could be explained. These explanations, which I called tele-flashes, were subdivided into three levels of difficulty, and thus the viewers could "order" the level corresponding to his own competence. There was a teletext introduction before the programme called "Panorama of the week" and several tests after the programme, reinforcing the words and phrases learned and providing some comprehension exercises. The whole idea was to provide educational and other programmes with a technique whereby English could be learned by viewers without textbooks or subtitles.

3. Microcomputers

The microcomputer programmes were made for ABC 80 and ABC 800 in collaboration with Stig Lundman. 23 grammar programmes for the elementary level and 23 for the intermediate or grammar school level were finished, all being published by LiberHermods. The following programmes were made:

1. The indefinite article
2. The definite article
3. Plurals
4. Comparison
5. Adjective or adverb
6. Substantivization
7. Personal pronouns
8. Possessives
9. The genitive
10. Demonstrative and relative pronouns
11. Reflexive pronouns
12. Indefinite pronouns
13. Weak verbs
14. Modals
15. Strong verbs

16. The infinitive or the ing-form
17. The progressive form
18. The passive voice
19. Prepositions
20. Conjunctions
21. Numerals
22. The do-periphrasis
23. Word order

4. Video

The experiments with video production were made in the TV studio at the University of Copenhagen. The idea was to train language functions in a new way during oral proficiency classes in the English Department. The students were given a general topic area - in this case, "Business in Hong Kong", and a set of language functions which they were asked to concentrate on while making the video programme. The following language functions were given:

I. Imparting and seeking factual information
   1. Identifying
   2. Asking

II. Expressing and finding out intellectual attitudes
   1. Expressing agreement and disagreement
   2. Accepting an offer or invitation
   3. Inquiring whether something is considered possible or impossible

III. Expressing and finding out emotional attitudes
   1. Expressing pleasure, liking
   2. Expressing displeasure, dislike
   3. Expressing interest or lack of interest
   4. Expressing surprise
   5. Expressing gratitude
   6. Expressing intention
   7. Expressing want, desire

IV. Expressing and finding out moral attitudes
   1. Expressing approval
   2. Expressing disapproval
   3. Expressing appreciation

V. Getting things done
   1. Suggesting a course of action
   2. Requesting others to do something

5. Instructing or directing others to do something

VI. Socializing

1. Greeting people
2. Introducing people
3. Taking leave
4. Proposing a toast
5. Making an appointment
6. Invitation to a party

The students were asked to write a brief synopsis, and at our next meeting to improvise on the basis of the synopsis - using most of the language functions already given.

Summing up

My views on the applicability of these techniques can be summed up as follows:

1. Videotext is at the moment rather costly and mainly used by business companies and big organizations rather than universities and schools. Videotext is marvellous as an information system because the number of pages you can send is nearly unlimited. The system is suitable for self-testing and can be used in distance education, since it is interactive.

2. Teletext is much more limited. A sender has only a few pages at his disposal. The system is not interactive. On the other hand you reach a very large audience. In a distance education programme a diagnostic test can for example be transmitted at a given time to a great many students. It can be used to reinforce vocabulary proficiency and to test vocabulary and grammar.

3. Microcomputers are suitable for self-testing but also for training grammar and vocabulary. Micros are tolerably cheap and are most certainly a thing for the future. At the moment language training on the microcomputer is more suitable for school level than university level.

4. Video. Video production is extremely useful for universities and schools being equipped with a video- or TV-studio. The videodisc is the newest electronic innovation and it will be most exciting to watch how the microcomputer will be linked with videodisc units.

Finally I should like to conclude by saying that from all the technologies I have mentioned, the microcomputer has most advantages. Not only because it is cheap, but because it is flexible and it has caught the

interest of young people and it will probably continue to do so.

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